

Torture is a Dirty Word

by Janet Jagan

There have been allegations that the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) has been involved in the use of torture in its efforts to gain information about the missing weapons, the discovery of which, has caused great anxiety at all levels.

The charge of torture is a very serious accusation and one that needs to be cleared up as early as possible. That is why PPP General Secretary Donald Ramotar has publicly called for an investigation. The President has announced that an investigation is taking place. The charge could be true or false, but it provides juicy and constant attacks by the media. The sooner the investigation concludes the better for the nation. A nasty allegation like that can harm Guyana's name and integrity.

We are a tiny country in comparison to the colossus to the north, the USA, but our name is just as important to our citizens as those of larger and more powerful nations. Right now, the USA is undergoing an extremely low opinion worldwide for its use of torture of prisoners of war at Guantanamo Bay Prison in



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Cuba, the rendition of its prisoners to countries which practice torture and for the awful scandal at Abu Ghraib where photos of sexual humiliation of prisoners exposed the US jailors in an Iraq prison.

Torture, as the dictionary explains, is the infliction of bodily pain for the purpose of punishment or means of persuasion and includes physical or mental pain. There is nothing new about torture, except that each century seems to create newer and more painful methods. In ancient times, the rack pulled the victim apart and the thumbscrew created excessive pain. Many were burned at the stake by slow fire, like the great heroine Joanne d'Arc. One of the great horrors of history was the Spanish Inquisition of the 15th century in which the Catholic Church tortured non-

Catholics, mainly Jews. Probably the most widely known torture was that of Jesus Christ, nailed to the cross and left to die a slow, painful death.

Modern science has devised newer methods. With the discovery of the use of electricity, electric shock to the genitals has been one of the most widely used. Since the American invasion of Iraq, we learn of new inventions like "water boarding" as they term it, when prisoners at Guantanamo are subjected to methods using water to make them feel they are drowning. There seems to be no lack of ingenuity when it comes to new methods of hurting and destroying people.

A report from Human Rights Watch, containing "firsthand accounts of torture of Iraqi Detainees by the US Army's 82nd Airborne Division" and issued on September 25, 2005 described torture used as including "severe beatings, blows and kicks to the face, chest, abdomen and extremities and repeated kicks to various parts of the detainees' bodies; the application of chemical substances to exposed skin and eyes; forced stress positions, such as holding heavy water jugs with arms

outstretched, sometimes to the point of unconsciousness; sleep deprivation; subjecting detainees to extremes of hot and cold; the stacking of detainees into human

that severe prisoner abuse was committed "only by a few rogues, poorly trained reserve personnel at a single facility in Iraq!"

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In Guyana, we are all deeply concerned about the accusations of soldiers being tortured, which indicates the quality of our citizenship. But in the USA, the quotes above are about incidents and reports of torture in 2004 and 2005. We are now in 2008, and nothing has yet been done by the country that claims to be the No. 1 democracy in the world, to stop its vile practices – condemned worldwide.

pyramids; and the withholding of food (beyond crackers) and water." (published in The New York Review of November 3, 2005).

In the same publication, we are reminded that when the Abu Ghraib scandal broke (the photos of naked prisoners being sexually humiliated) in April 2004, senior officials of the Bush administration claimed

accusations of soldiers being tortured, which indicates the quality of our citizenship. But in the USA, the quotes above are about incidents and reports of torture in 2004 and 2005. We are now in 2008, and nothing has yet been done by the country that claims to be the No. 1 democracy in the world, to stop its vile practices – condemned worldwide.

There have been calls by former President Bill Clinton, former US Secretary of State Colin Powell and former Secretary of the United Nations Kofi Anan to close down Guantanamo Bay prison. And only this past week, the top US general also made a similar call for the notorious prison to be closed down.

Whether the White House will respond to strong pressure at home and abroad is yet to be seen. It is widely known that President Bush rarely listens to others than his small clique of hardliners, a fact that his party will have to face in the upcoming elections in November this year. It seems pretty certain, at this stage, that the Republican Party is massively bruised by his numerous mistakes. But not only that, he has given the country he rules a name it will take quite some time to improve.

We can only hope that the use of torture, which still exists in many countries, will cease and that all of man's progress in so many divergent fields will help to overcome the vicious practices that still persist in our 21st century.